

The Book of Psalms: An Overview

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The Book of Psalms in the Hebrew Bible is actually a collection of five different "books" containing a total of 150 Psalms of several different literary genres. The following tables give an overview of several features of each of the Psalms, along with some summary statistics:

- **Books I-V:** The common division into five separate "books" of Psalms is based on the concluding doxologies and/or "Amen"s found in 41:14; 72:18-20; 89:53; 106:48; and the entirety of Ps 150 ([see below](#)).
 - Note that **Book IV** is found **below Book III** in the following chart, since both of these are much shorter than the other three books.
- **Ps#** - The Psalms are numbered from 1 to 150 in the Hebrew Bible; however, Psalms 9 & 10 really form one longer Psalm, just as Psalms 42 & 43 belong together.
 - An **asterisk (*)** before the Psalm number marks the eight "Acrostic" Psalms (9/10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145), those in which the first letter of each verse (or group of verses) follows the alphabetical order of the Hebrew alphabet (which is also the main reason we know Ps 9 & 10 belong together).
- **#Vv.** - The second column lists the number of verses in each Psalm, according to the versification of the *New American Bible* translation.
 - For many of the Psalms, the number of verses is slightly different (often one or two less) in the King James Version, Revised Standard Version, and other modern English translations, due to differences between the ancient Hebrew, the Greek Septuagint, and/or the Latin Vulgate versions of the Bible.
- **Type** - In the Hebrew text itself, many of the Psalms have a superscription that identifies what type of composition it is: Psalm, Prayer, Song, Praise Hymn, etc.
 - Biblical scholars are uncertain and debate what the "Maskil" and "Miktam" and "Shiggaion" are; there is greater agreement and clarity about those labeled "Song of Ascents" and "Halleluia" (Praise God).
- **Attrib.** - Many psalms are also explicitly attributed to a particular biblical figure, very often (King) David, but sometimes also the Korahites, Asaph, or other individuals.
 - An **ampersand (&)** in this column indicates those psalms in which the superscription gives further information about the text's historical context (e.g. Ps 102: "The prayer of one afflicted and wasting away whose anguish is poured out before the Lord"), and/or instructions (often explicitly addressed "To the Leader") about what type of musical instruments or tune to use (e.g., Ps 4: "With stringed instruments"; or Ps 46: "According to *alamoth* [a tune]").
- **Category** - Modern Scholars classify the Psalms into several different literary categories, including **Hymns, Laments, Songs of Thanksgiving, etc.**, some of which are individual (I/me/my), while others are communal (we/us/our).
- See the **second table below** for a complete listing of the different types, attributions, and categories of psalms, and the number of occurrences of each.

Book I (Pss 1-41)					Book II (Pss 42-72)					Bk III (Pss 73-89)					Bk V (Pss 107-150)				
Ps#	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Category	Ps#	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Category	Ps#	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Category	Ps#	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Category
1	6	.	.	Wisdom	42/43	12+5	Maskil	Kor	Lam-Indiv	73	28	Ps	Asa	WisPoem	107	43	.	.	Thnx-Cmty
2	12	.	.	Royal	44	27	Maskil	Kor	Lam-Cmty	74	23	Maskil	Asa	Lam-Cmty	108	14	Ps+Sg	Dav	Misc
3	9	Ps	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	45	18	Mas+Sg	Kor&	Royal	75	11	Ps+Sg	Asa&	Thnx-Cmty	109	31	Ps	Dav	Lam-Indiv

4	9	Ps	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	46	12	Song	Kor&	Zion	76	13	Ps+Sg	Asa&	Zion	110	7	Ps	Dav	Royal
5	13	Ps	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	47	10	Ps	Kor	YHWH	77	21	Ps	Asa&	Lam-Indiv	*111	10	Hal	.	Hymn
6	11	Ps	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	48	15	Ps+Sg	Kor	Zion	78	72	Maskil	Asa	Misc	*112	10	Hal	.	WisPoem
7	18	Shig	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	49	21	Ps	Kor	WisPoem	79	13	Ps	Asa	Lam-Cmtly	113	9	Hal	.	Hymn
8	10	Ps	Dav&	Hymn	50	23	Ps	Asa	Misc	80	20	Ps	Asa&	Lam-Cmtly	114	8	.	.	Hymn
*9/10	21+18	Ps	Dav&	Thnx-Indiv	51	21	Ps	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	81	17	.	Asa&	Misc	115	18	.	.	Trust-Cmtly
11	7	.	Dav	Trust-Indiv	52	11	Maskil	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	82	8	Ps	Asa	Misc	116	19	.	.	Thnx-Indiv
12	9	Ps	Dav&	Lam-Cmtly	53	7	Maskil	Dav&	Lam-Cmtly	83	19	Ps+Sg	Asa	Lam-Cmtly	117	2	Hal	.	Hymn
13	6	Ps	Dav	Lam-Indiv	54	9	Maskil	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	84	13	Ps	Kor&	Zion	118	29	.	.	Thnx-Cmtly
14	7	.	Dav	Lam-Cmtly	55	24	Maskil	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	85	14	Ps	Kor	Lam-Cmtly	*119	176	.	.	WisPoem
15	5	Ps	Dav	Misc	56	14	Miktam	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	86	17	Prayer	Dav	Lam-Indiv	120	7	Asc	.	Lam-Indiv
16	11	Miktam	Dav	Trust-Indiv	57	12	Miktam	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	87	7	Ps+Sg	Kor	Zion	121	8	Asc	.	Trust-Indiv
17	15	Prayer	Dav	Lam-Indiv	58	12	Miktam	Dav&	Lam-Cmtly	88	19	Ps+Sg+Mas	Kor&	Lam-Indiv	122	9	Asc	Dav	Zion
18	51	.	Dav&	Royal	59	18	Miktam	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	89	53	Maskil	Ethan	Lam-Cmtly	123	4	Asc	.	Lam-Cmtly
19	15	Ps	Dav	Hymn	60	14	Miktam	Dav&	Lam-Cmtly						124	8	Asc	Dav	Thnx-Cmtly
20	10	Ps	Dav	Royal	61	9	.	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	Bk IV (Pss 90-106)					125	5	Asc	.	Trust-Cmtly
21	14	Ps	Dav	Royal	62	13	Ps	Dav&	Trust-Indiv	Ps#	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Category	126	6	Asc	.	Lam-Cmtly
22	32	Ps	Dav&	Lam-	63	12	Ps	Dav&	Lam-	90	17	Prayer	Moses	Lam-	127	5	Asc	Sol	WisPoem

				Indiv					Indiv					Cmty					
23	6	Ps	Dav	Trust-Indiv	64	11	Ps	Dav	Lam-Indiv	91	16	.	.	Trust-Indiv	128	6	Asc	.	WisPoem
24	10	Ps	Dav	Misc	65	14	Ps+Sg	Dav	Thnx-Cmty	92	16	Ps+Sg-Sab	.	Thnx-Indiv	129	8	Asc	.	Trust-Cmty
*25	22	.	Dav	Lam-Indiv	66	20	Ps+Sg	.	Thnx-Cmty	93	5	.	.	YHWH	130	8	Asc	.	Lam-Indiv
26	11	.	Dav	Lam-Indiv	67	8	Ps+Sg	&	Thnx-Cmty	94	23	.	.	Lam-Cmty	131	3	Asc	Dav	Trust-Indiv
27	14	.	Dav	Lam-Indiv	68	36	Ps+Sg	Dav	Thnx-Cmty	95	11	.	.	Misc	132	18	Asc	.	Royal
28	9	.	Dav	Lam-Indiv	69	37	.	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	96	13	.	.	YHWH	133	3	Asc	Dav	Misc
29	11	Ps	Dav	Hymn	70	6	.	Dav&	Lam-Indiv	97	12	.	.	YHWH	134	3	Asc	.	Misc
30	13	Ps+Sg	Dav	Thnx-Indiv	71	24	.	.	Lam-Indiv	98	9	Ps	.	YHWH	135	21	Hal	.	Hymn
31	25	Ps	Dav	Lam-Indiv	72	20	.	Sol	Royal	99	9	.	.	YHWH	136	26	.	.	Hymn
32	11	Maskil	Dav	Thnx-Indiv						100	5	Ps-Thnx	.	Hymn	137	9	.	.	Lam-Cmty
33	22	.	.	Hymn						101	8	Ps	Dav	Royal	138	8	.	Dav	Thnx-Indiv
*34	23	.	Dav&	Thnx-Indiv						102	29	Prayer	&	Lam-Indiv	139	24	Ps	Dav	Misc
35	28	.	Dav	Lam-Indiv						103	22	.	Dav	Hymn	140	14	Ps	Dav	Lam-Indiv
36	13	.	Dav&	Lam-Indiv						104	35	[Hal-at end]	.	Hymn	141	10	Ps	Dav	Lam-Indiv
*37	40	.	Dav	WisPoem						105	45	[Hal-at end]	.	Misc	142	8	Maskil	Dav&	Lam-Indiv
38	23	Ps	Dav&	Lam-Indiv						106	48	Hal	.	Lam-Cmty	143	12	Ps	Dav	Lam-Indiv
39	14	Ps	Dav&	Lam-Indiv											144	15	.	Dav	Royal
40	18	Ps	Dav	Lam-											*145	21	Praise	Dav	Hymn

				Indiv
41	14	Ps	Dav	Thnx-Indiv

Abbreviations and Summary:

Here is a *complete listing* of the types and attributions mentioned in the superscripts of the Hebrew Bible, as well as the categories used by some modern scholars, along with the *total number of each* that occurs among the 150 Psalms. Please note the following:

- There is some duplication, since some superscriptions mention both "psalm" and "song"; some songs are explicitly called "love song" or "sabbath song"; etc.
- The exact meaning of *maskil*, *miktam*, and *shiggaion* is unknown and/or debated among scholars.
- Some superscriptions mention the type but omit an attribution (e.g., Ps 92: "A Psalm. A sabbath song"), and vice-versa (e.g., Pss 25-28 simply say "Of David" without any identification as a "Psalm" or "Prayer," etc.).

Type (Headings in Hebrew Bible)		Total	Attribution (in HB)		Total	Category (suggested by Modern Scholars)		Total
Ps	Psalm / Mizmor	57	Dav	David	73	Hymn	Hymn / Song of Praise	19
Ps-Thnx	Psalm of Thanksgiving	1	Asa	Asaph	12	YHWH	Hymn of the Lord's Kingship	6
Sg	Song / Shir	30	Kor	Korahites	11	Lam-Indiv	Individual Lament	43
Sg-Asc	Song of Ascent	15	Sol	Solomon	2	Lam-Cmt	Community Lament	18
Sg-Lv	Love Song	2	Ethan	Ethan	1	Royal	Royal or Messianic Psalm	10
Sg-Sab	Sabbath Song	1	Moses	Moses	1	Thnx-Indiv	Individual Psalm of Gratitude	8
Mas	Maskil / (meaning?)	13	.	.	.	Thnx-Cmt	Communal Psalm of Gratitude	8
Mik	Miktam / (meaning?)	6	.	.	.	Trust-Indiv	Individual Psalm of Confidence	7
Hal	Praise God / Halleluia	11	.	.	.	Trust-Cmt	Communal Psalm of Confidence	3
Prayer	Prayer / Tephillah	5	.	.	.	Wisdom	Wisdom Poem	8
Praise	Praise / Tehillah	1	.	.	.	Zion	Song of Zion (God's Mountain)	6
Shig	Shiggaion / complaint?	1	&	[extra info]	41	Misc.	Miscellaneous, hard to classify	12

Conclusions of the Five "Books" within the Book of Psalms:

- **Ps 41:14** – Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from all eternity and forever. Amen. Amen.
- **Ps 72:18-20** – Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does wonderful deeds.
19 Blessed be his glorious name forever; may he fill all the earth with his glory. Amen and amen.

20 The end of the psalms of David, son of Jesse.

- **Ps 89:53** – Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and amen!
- **Ps 106:48** – Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting!
Let all the people say, Amen! Hallelujah!
- **Ps 150:1-6** – “Hallelujah! Praise God in his holy sanctuary; give praise in the mighty dome of heaven.
2 Give praise for his mighty deeds, praise him for his great majesty.
3 Give praise with blasts upon the horn, praise him with harp and lyre.
4 Give praise with tambourines and dance, praise him with strings and pipes.
5 Give praise with crashing cymbals, praise him with sounding cymbals.
6 Let everything that has breath give praise to the LORD! Hallelujah!

Collections within the Book of Psalms:

- An old collection of Psalms attributed to David (Ps 3–41)
- An second collection of the Psalms of David (Ps 51–72)
- A collection of Psalms attributed to the Korah musical guild (Ps 42–49; also 84–85 & 87–88)
- A collection of Psalms attributed to the Asaph musical guild (Ps 50 & 73–83)
- A collection Psalms of YHWH's kingship (Ps 93–99)
- A collection of Psalms of Pilgrimage; a.k.a. Psalms of "Ascent" to Jerusalem (Ps 120–134)
- Psalms 1–2 function as an Introduction to the whole book
- Psalms 146–150 function as a Conclusion to the whole book.

Miscellaneous Tidbits:

- **Shortest:** Psalm 117 (only 2 verses!)
- **Longest:** Psalm 119 (has 22 sections of 8 verses each, totalling 176 verses!)
- **Most Similar:** Psalms 14 and 53 are almost identical; Psalms 40:13-17 and 70:2-6 are also almost identical.
- **More Duplications:** Psalms 108:2-6 is identical to 57:8-12; while Psalm 108:7-14 is identical to 60:7-14.
- **Oldest:** Psalm 29 (probably adapted from a Canaanite hymn to the storm-god Baal)
- **Extra:** Psalm 151 (found in the OT Apocrypha)

Use of Psalms in Catholic Liturgy:

- [Psalms included in the *Lectionary for Mass*: Sundays](#)
- [Psalms included in the *Lectionary for Mass*: Weekdays](#)
- [Psalms used in the Liturgy of the Hours: Four-Week Psalter](#)
- [Psalms used in the Liturgy of the Hours: Index](#)
- [Psalms omitted from the Liturgy of the Hours](#)

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